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C O N F I D E N T I A L VATICAN 000104

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [VT](#)
SUBJECT: HOLY SEE: ISRAELI VIEWS ON HAMAS, ISLAM, FUNDAMENTAL
AGREEMENT

REF: SANDROLINI-LARREA EMAILS

CLASSIFIED BY: Christopher Sandrolini, Deputy Chief of Mission,
EXEC, State.
REASON: 1.4 (d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary. During a May 30 meeting with Ambassador,
Israeli Ambassador commented on Islam, Hamas, Israel-Holy See
relations, and the Holy See's Custodian of the Holy Lands. End
Summary.

[1](#)2. (C) During a May 30 meeting with Ambassador Rooney, Israeli
ambassador to the Holy See Oded Ben-Hur shared his views on
several topics.

[1](#)3. (C) Islam: Ben-Hur expressed great concern over the doctrine
of immutability and the literal interpretation of the word of
God as expressed through the prophet Mohammed in the Koran, and
noted that Pope Benedict XVI's thinking along these lines as
well. This rigidity is problematic for Christians trying to
build bridges of understanding and create a sense of moderation
and tolerance with Muslims. The call of Mohammed to evangelize
or conquer infidels only adds to this problem.

[1](#)4. (C) Hamas: according to Ben-Hur, Hamas will become more
moderate and reasonable. He predicted they would agree to the
challenge of President Abbas to recognize Israel, and was
optimistic about confidential talks going on now with Hamas.

[1](#)5. (C) Holy See: Ben-Hur said the recent meeting between
Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni and Archbishop Giovanni
Lajolo, the Holy See's FM-equivalent, was very successful. He
thinks Livni will break the logjam in the Israeli bureaucracy
impeding resolution of issues blocking the Holy See-Israel
Fundamental Agreement. Ben-Hur suggested that at an appropriate
time, Israel might seek a commitment from the Holy See for
increased pilgrimage to Jerusalem -- something that would bring
significant economic benefit to Israel -- as a consideration.
Ben-Hur predicted that the pope would visit Israel in 2007 and
agreed with ambassador that this could hardly happen absent
serious progress on the Fundamental Agreement.

[1](#)6. (C) Pizzaballa: Ben-Hur also commented on Fr. Pierbattista
Pizzaballa, a Franciscan who is the Holy See's Custodian of the
Holy Lands and who drew some attention a few weeks ago after
telling a journalist that in his position he could not do
otherwise than to cooperate with Hamas insofar as it represented
the duly elected authority in Palestinian areas. Ben-Hur
reiterated comments we reported earlier (ref) to the effect that
Israel liked and respected Pizzaballa and understood his
position.

COMMENT

[1](#)7. (C) Ben-Hur is active and well-informed -- though

occasionally too outspoken for the Holy See's liking -- and has been typically candid with us on these issues in the past. Progress on the Fundamental Agreement would be a source of great satisfaction to the Holy See. We have reported previously (refs) on Father Pizzaballa's bona fides.

ROONEY